

Our troops have fought bravely in the harshest of conditions. They are our constituents. They are the sons and daughters of our friends and neighbors. They have carried out extraordinarily difficult missions, including tracking down and capturing Saddam Hussein and killing Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

They have sacrificed so much. We support them unequivocally, Democrats and Republicans. The question is how we can best support them.

This was to be the year of transition. That was what the Congress voted last year, and what the President signed into law. Yet, the Administration continues to simply stay the course. This course is not in America's best interest.

Iraq has a new constitution. It has had elections. It has a democratically elected government.

We have trained and equipped more than 100,000 Iraqi soldiers.

It has been more than three years since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. More than 2,500 Americans have died. We have been there as long as we were in World War II.

The Iraqi people need to take responsibility for their own country. It will not happen immediately, but both the Levin amendment and the Kerry amendment move us toward that goal.

I have cast over 12,000 votes in this Senate. I am as proud of my vote against the open ended resolution that gave the President the authority to invade Iraq as any I have cast in 32 years. It is time for the Congress to change the course of a policy that has cost us hundreds of billions of dollars that would have been far better spent here at home, that has weakened our leadership, that is dividing our country, and that has not made us safer.

I yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senator from Illinois is to be recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in the course of a congressional career, you are asked to make many votes. Most of them are fairly routine and not long remembered. In the course of my career on Capitol Hill, those votes that have kept me up at night, those I remember years after they are cast relate to one issue—the issue of war. When you have cast that vote, if the decision to go forward has been made, people will die—not just the enemy but brave Americans and usually innocent civilians.

So I remember very well that night in October 2002, when we were called to

this floor of the Senate to vote on the issue of authorizing the President to go to war in Iraq. I say to the Senator from West Virginia, I will never forget that moment. There were 23 of us—22 on this side of the aisle and 1 on the other side—who stood up and voted no. If the Senator recalls, that vote ended late at night, near midnight. I stayed on the floor because I knew I would not be able to sleep when I got home. There were two Senators who were here waiting with the same feelings of emotion. One of them was our late colleague, Senator Paul Wellstone. Senator Wellstone was going back home to Minnesota to face reelection. I remember saying to him, “Paul, I hope this doesn’t cost you the election.” Do you know what he said to me? He said, “It doesn’t matter, this is what I believe. This is who I am.” That was the last conversation I ever had with Paul Wellstone. He died in a plane crash a few days later. I have thought about him a lot ever since and I miss him. I miss his voice. I wish he were here today. If he were here, I know what he would be doing. He would be joining me in supporting the Kerry amendment. I believe that in the meantime he probably would have voted, as I have, to support the troops. I voted to give the President every penny he has asked for in this war. Once that decision to go forward was made, my yardstick was very basic. If it were your son or daughter in uniform in Iraq, would you not give them everything they needed to wage this war and to come home safely? It was an easy question to ask and answer, particularly if you lived through the debacle of Vietnam, when our poor soldiers became the victims of public contempt because of our displeasure with the decisions of politicians. That must never happen again.

So now in the fourth year of the struggle, I have given the President every resource he has asked for. I have stood behind him and this administration even when I disagreed with their policy because I felt it was best that we stay uniform.

Today, I join in a decision being made by several of my colleagues to say that we must make it clear to the Iraqi people that our commitment is not forever. What have we given the Iraqis? We have given them 2,508 American lives. We have given them 18,000 soldiers who have returned home with injuries of body and spirit—2,000 with head injuries that may be life-changing. We have given them \$300 billion of our treasury. We have given them the focus of our attention and the focus of our resources at the expense of our own country. What have they received in return? Their dictator has been deposed. We dug him out of a hole in the ground, put him on trial in front of his own people. We have given the Iraqi people three elections and two governments. We said control your future and your fate; this is your country. We helped them train about 264,000 soldiers and policemen. We invested billions in their infrastructure for oil and water.

We have given that nation virtually more than any other nation has ever given. But now we must tell the Iraqis something very straight and simple: It is time for them to stand and defend their own country. If they truly believe in the future of Iraq, it is time for them to stand and risk their own lives and their own blood for their own nation. This amendment by Senators KERRY, FEINGOLD, and others, says to them that at the end of the year we will consider the withdrawal of all of our troops.

Now, I say that with some equivocation because if you read the amendment, Senators KERRY and FEINGOLD have been careful. They understand that we are not going to pull every troop out as of the last day regardless of the circumstances. They have carefully crafted the language, which says that if we face a threat of terrorism, if we are still needed to continue training troops, or if there is danger to Americans at our facilities, we can stay and defend, as we should. It is not an immediate withdrawal on the last day. But it says to the Iraqis: You must stand and fight on your own.

I have been told over and over again how well trained these Iraqi soldiers are. The proof of their fitness for battle is when the first Iraqi soldier replaces an American soldier, so that soldier can come home with his mission truly accomplished.

If we leave this open-ended, as those on the other side would suggest, I am afraid the Iraqis will understand that they have the best military in the world that will stay there indefinitely. How can we do that to our soldiers who have performed so well, who have been the model of bravery, the model of patriotism?

We have been misled into this war. We were given information by the administration that was not true. This war has not been well managed by this administration in terms of the number of troops sent into the field or the equipment being given to them. We know that. For years, we have been promised that these Iraqis would stand and fight and we could come home. That has not happened. Now I have reached that point that other colleagues have reached as well, where I believe the Iraqis must be told that now it is your nation, now it is your turn.

For those who say that one year is not enough time—one year is not enough time? What happened in the last 12 months in Iraq, in the last 12-month period of time? We have lost 762 American soldiers in the last 12 months. We have spent \$90 billion in the last 12 months. We have seen thousands of soldiers return home with injuries. It is not just the passage of time, it is the passage of life and life's journey for so many of our soldiers. Twelve months is a reasonable time—12 months, and all that it means for us and all that we would give, is a reasonable time.